

THE CHURCH AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZING: A HISTORY OF MUTUAL ENTANGLEMENT

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Key Figures:

- **Saul Alinsky** (1909-1972), the “dean” of community organizing in the U.S. and originator of faith-based organizing as we know it
- **Bishop Bernard Sheil** (1888-1969), auxiliary Catholic bishop of Chicago, director of the Catholic Youth Organization, and key collaborator of Alinsky; inaugural board chair of the Industrial Areas Foundation
- **Jacques Maritain** (1882-1973), French Catholic philosopher who was one of the leading Catholic intellectuals of the 20th Century; personal friend of Alinsky and active promoter of his work from the mid-‘40s until his death
- **Mgr. John O’Grady** (1886-1986), Catholic priest who served as executive secretary of national Catholic Charities from 1920 to 1961; Alinsky’s primary institutional supporter from the mid-‘40s through the late ‘50s
- **Rev. Arthur Brazier** (1921-2010), African American Protestant pastor (Apostolic Church of God) and president of The Woodlawn Organization (TWO), the IAF’s first majority-Black and Black-led organization
- **Ernesto “Ernie” Cortés** (b. 1943), Chicano Catholic organizer who built COPS in San Antonio, and developed the paradigm for “faith-based organizing” after Alinsky
- **Sisters Christine Stephens** (1940-2019), **Maribeth Larkin**, and **Pearl Caesar** (1943-): Catholic Sisters of the Divine Providence, who were Cortés’ key collaborators in developing faith-based organizing

Key Organizations:

- **Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council (BYNC)**: Alinsky’s first people’s organization, founded in 1938 and built largely from immigrant Catholic meatpacking workers in the Back of the Yards neighborhood, Chicago; became the paradigm for Alinsky’s community organizing
- **Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF)**: The national training organization Alinsky founded in 1940, under Bishop Sheil’s impetus, to create people’s organizations modeled on the BYNC around the country
- **The Woodlawn Organization (TWO)**: The IAF’s first majority-Black and Black led organization, founded in 1960 and led by Rev. Arthur Brazier; actively cultivated ties to the Southern Civil Rights movement
- **Communities Organized for Public Service (COPS)**: The IAF organization Ernie Cortés founded in 1974, with a core base of 25 Latino Catholic parishes; became the paradigm for post-Alinsky faith-based organizing
- **PICO (Pacific Institute for Community Organizing) and Gamaliel Foundation**: Alongside the IAF, the two major national/international networks for faith-based organizing after Alinsky; both founded by Catholics; PICO is now “Faith in Action”

Other Key Terms:

- **“People’s Organization”:** The distinctive kind of community organization Alinsky built: a neighborhood-based “organization of organizations” comprised of all the core social institutions in the neighborhood (churches, unions, fraternal organizations, etc.) and intended to serve as a vehicle for grassroots democratic politics
- **Catholic Social Teaching:** The official doctrinal teaching of the Catholic church on social and political issues; conventionally dated to Leo XIII’s encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891), its most recent examples are Pope Francis’s encyclicals *Laudato Si* (2015) and *Fratelli Tutti* (2020)
- **Common Good:** The central principle of Catholic Social Teaching, which defines it as the “sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily”; the purpose of politics, according to Social Teaching, is to allow all people to pursue the common good together
- **Dignity of the Person:** Another core principle of Catholic Social Teaching, it refers to the incomparable worth every person has owing to their creation in the image of God; establishes every person as a free and responsible agent whose rights are to be respected by society, yet who is also entitled to fully participate in shaping society
- **Subsidiarity:** Another core principle of the common good, it stresses the importance of strong intermediary institutions and prioritizes giving as much freedom and responsibility to local communities and small-scale associations as possible; understood to derive from the dignity of the person